

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

Esther Gruberger,
individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated,
Plaintiff(s)

-v.-

AR Resources, Inc.;
and John Does 1-25.

Defendant(s).

Civil Action No: 3:21-cv-11625

CLASS ACTION COMPLAINT

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

Plaintiff Esther Gruberger, brings this Class Action Complaint by and through her attorneys, Stein Saks, PLLC, against Defendant AR Resources, Inc. ("AR"), individually and on behalf of a class of all others similarly situated, pursuant to Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, based upon information and belief of Plaintiff's counsel, except for allegations specifically pertaining to Plaintiff, which are based upon Plaintiff's personal knowledge.

INTRODUCTION/PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act ("FDCPA") was enacted in response to the "abundant evidence of the use of abusive, deceptive, and unfair debt collection practices by many debt collectors." 15 U.S.C. §1692(a). Congress was concerned that "abusive debt collection practices contribute to the number of personal bankruptcies, to material instability, to the loss of jobs, and to invasions of individual privacy." *Id.* It concluded that "existing laws...[we]re inadequate to protect consumers," and that "the effective collection of debts" does not require "misrepresentation or other abusive debt collection practices." 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692(b) & (c).

2. The purpose of the Act was not only to eliminate abusive debt collection practices, but also to ensure "that those debt collectors who refrain from using abusive debt collection practices are not competitively disadvantaged." *Id.* § 1692(e). After determining that the existing consumer

protection laws were inadequate, *Id.* § 1692(b), the Act gave consumers a private cause of action against debt collectors who fail to comply. *Id.* § 1692k.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

3. The Court has jurisdiction over this class action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331 and 15 U.S.C. § 1692 et. seq. The Court has pendent jurisdiction over state law claims, if any, in this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a).

4. Venue is proper in this judicial district pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b)(2) as this is where the Plaintiff resides as well as where a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred.

NATURE OF THE ACTION

5. Plaintiff brings this class action on behalf of a class of New Jersey consumers under §1692 et seq. of Title 15 of the United States Code, also known as the Fair Debt Collections Practices Act ("FDCPA"), and

6. Plaintiff is seeking damages and declaratory relief.

PARTIES

7. Plaintiff is a resident of the State of New Jersey, County of Ocean.

8. Defendant AR is a “debt collector” as the phrase is defined in 15 U.S.C. § 1692(a)(6) and used in the FDCPA with an address for service c/o Hamburg, Rubin, Mullin, Maxwell & Lupin PC, 375 Morris Road, Lansdale, PA 19446.

9. Upon information and belief, Defendant AR is a company that uses the mail, telephone, and facsimile and regularly engages in business the principal purpose of which is to attempt to collect debts alleged to be due to itself or another.

10. John Does 1-25, are fictitious names of individuals and businesses alleged for the purpose of substituting names of Defendants whose identities will be disclosed in discovery and should be made parties to this action.

CLASS ALLEGATIONS

11. Plaintiff brings this claim on behalf of the following class, pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(a) and 23(b)(3).

12. The Class consists of:

- a. all individuals with addresses in the State of New Jersey;
- b. to whom Defendant AR sent an initial letter;
- c. attempting to collect a consumer debt;
- d. that states the recipient must notify the Defendant in writing within 30 days to dispute the validity of the debt;
- e. which letter was sent on or after a date one (1) year prior to the filing of this action and on or before a date twenty-one (21) days after the filing of this action.

13. The identities of all class members are readily ascertainable from the records of Defendant and those companies and entities on whose behalf it attempts to collect and/or has purchased debts.

14. Excluded from the Plaintiff Class are the Defendant and all officers, members, partners, managers, directors and employees of the Defendant and their respective immediate families, and legal counsel for all parties to this action, and all members of their immediate families.

15. There are questions of law and fact common to the Plaintiff Class, which common issues predominate over any issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is

whether the Defendant's written communications to consumers, in the form attached as Exhibit A, violate 15 U.S.C. §§ 1692e, 1692f, and 1692g.

16. The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the class members, as all are based upon the same facts and legal theories. The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the Plaintiff Class defined in this complaint. The Plaintiff has retained counsel with experience in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions, and neither the Plaintiff nor her attorneys have any interests, which might cause them not to vigorously pursue this action.

17. This action has been brought, and may properly be maintained, as a class action pursuant to the provisions of Rule 23 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure because there is a well-defined community interest in the litigation:

- a. **Numerosity:** The Plaintiff is informed and believes, and on that basis alleges, that the Plaintiff Class defined above is so numerous that joinder of all members would be impractical.
- b. **Common Questions Predominate:** Common questions of law and fact exist as to all members of the Plaintiff Class and those questions predominate over any questions or issues involving only individual class members. The principal issue is whether the Defendants' written communications to consumers, in the form **attached as Exhibit A** violate 15 U.S.C. § 1692e, 1692f, and 1692g.
- c. **Typicality:** The Plaintiff's claims are typical of the claims of the class members. The Plaintiff and all members of the Plaintiff Class have claims arising out of the Defendants' common uniform course of conduct complained of herein.
- d. **Adequacy:** The Plaintiff will fairly and adequately protect the interests of the class members insofar as Plaintiff has no interests that are adverse to the absent

class members. The Plaintiff is committed to vigorously litigating this matter. Plaintiff has also retained counsel experienced in handling consumer lawsuits, complex legal issues, and class actions. Neither the Plaintiff nor counsel have any interests which might cause them not to vigorously pursue the instant class action lawsuit.

- e. **Superiority:** A class action is superior to the other available means for the fair and efficient adjudication of this controversy because individual joinder of all members would be impracticable. Class action treatment will permit a large number of similarly situated persons to prosecute their common claims in a single forum efficiently and without unnecessary duplication of effort and expense that individual actions would engender.

18. Certification of a class under Rule 23(b)(3) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure is also appropriate in that the questions of law and fact common to members of the Plaintiff Class predominate over any questions affecting an individual member, and a class action is superior to other available methods for the fair and efficient adjudication of the controversy.

19. Depending on the outcome of further investigation and discovery, Plaintiff may, at the time of class certification motion, seek to certify a class(es) only as to particular issues pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(c)(4).

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

20. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

21. Some time prior to October 21, 2020, Plaintiff allegedly incurred a debt to non-party RMA of New Jersey (“RMA”).

22. The alleged debt arose from a financial obligation that was primarily for personal, family, or household purposes, specifically medical services.

23. RMA is a "creditor" as defined by 15 U.S.C. § 1692a (4).

24. Upon information and belief, RMA contracted with the Defendant AR to collect the alleged debt.

25. AR collects and attempts to collect debts incurred or alleged to have been incurred for personal, family or household purposes on behalf of itself or other creditors using the United States Postal Services, telephone and internet.

Violation – October 21, 2020 Collection Letter

26. On or about October 21, 2020, Defendant sent Plaintiff an initial collection letter. A copy of this letter is attached as Exhibit A.

27. The letter states:

Unless you notify this office in writing within 30 days after receiving this notice that you dispute the validity of this debt, or any portion thereof, this office will assume this debt is valid.

28. However, 15 U.S.C. § 1692g requires that an initial collection letter must include a written notice containing - ...

(3) a statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector

29. Defendant improperly stated that the dispute must be *in writing* which is untrue.

30. The consumer's rights are being restricted because even a simple phone call is sufficient to invoke these rights.

31. These actions by Defendant deceive the consumer since he cannot properly evaluate the actions required to dispute the debt.

32. Had Plaintiff known a phone call would have sufficed to dispute the debt she may have done so.

33. Defendant's letter created an appreciable risk to Plaintiff of being unable to properly assert her rights.

34. Plaintiff would have pursued a different course of action were it not for Defendants' statutory violations.

35. Because of this, Plaintiff expended time, money, and effort in determining the proper course of action.

36. These violations by Defendants were knowing, willful, negligent and/or intentional, and Defendants did not maintain procedures reasonably adapted to avoid any such violations.

37. Defendants' collection efforts with respect to this alleged debt from Plaintiff caused Plaintiff to suffer concrete and particularized harm, inter alia, because the FDCPA provides Plaintiff with the legally protected right to be not to be misled or treated unfairly with respect to any action for the collection of any consumer debt.

38. Defendants' deceptive, misleading, and unfair representations with respect to its collection efforts were material misrepresentations that affected and frustrated Plaintiff's ability to intelligently respond to Defendants' collection efforts because Plaintiff could not adequately respond to Defendants' demand for payment of this debt.

39. Defendants' actions created an appreciable risk to Plaintiff of being unable to properly respond or handle Defendants' debt collection.

40. Plaintiff was confused and misled to her detriment by the statements in the dunning letter, and relied on the contents of the letter to her detriment.

41. As a result of Defendants' deceptive, misleading and false debt collection practices, Plaintiff has been damaged.

COUNT I
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692e et seq.

42. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

43. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692e.

44. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692e, a debt collector may not use any false, deceptive, or misleading representation or means in connection with the collection of any debt.

45. Defendant violated 15 U.S.C. §1692e:

- a. By requiring a dispute of the debt be made in writing or the debt would be assumed valid, in violation of § 1692e (5);
- b. By falsely requiring a dispute of the debt be made in writing in violation of §§ §1692e and 1692e (10).

46. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692e et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT II
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692f et seq.

47. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

48. In the alternative, Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692f.

49. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692f, a debt collector may not use any unfair or unconscionable means in connection with the collection of any debt.

50. Defendant violated this section by requiring that a dispute of the debt be made in writing.

51. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692f et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

COUNT III
VIOLATIONS OF THE FAIR DEBT COLLECTION PRACTICES ACT
15 U.S.C. §1692g et seq.

52. Plaintiff repeats the above allegations as if set forth here.

53. Defendant's debt collection efforts attempted and/or directed towards the Plaintiff violated various provisions of the FDCPA, including but not limited to 15 U.S.C. § 1692g.

54. Pursuant to 15 U.S.C. §1692g (a):

Within five days after the initial communication with a consumer in connection with the collection of any debt, a debt collector shall, unless the following information is contained in the initial communication or the consumer has paid the debt, send the consumer a written notice containing –

...

(3) a statement that unless the consumer, within thirty days after receipt of the notice, disputes the validity of the debt, or any portion thereof, the debt will be assumed to be valid by the debt collector;

55. Defendant violated this section by adding the false requirement that the dispute be in writing.

56. By reason thereof, Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for judgment that Defendant's conduct violated Section 1692g et seq. of the FDCPA, actual damages, statutory damages, costs and attorneys' fees.

DEMAND FOR TRIAL BY JURY

57. Pursuant to Rule 38 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, Plaintiff hereby requests a trial by jury on all issues so triable.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Esther Gruberger, individually and on behalf of all others similarly situated, demands judgment from Defendant AR, as follows:

- a) Declaring that this action is properly maintainable as a Class Action and certifying Plaintiff as Class representative, and Eliyahu Babad, Esq. as Class Counsel;
- b) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class statutory damages;
- c) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class actual damages;
- d) Awarding Plaintiff costs of this Action, including reasonable attorneys' fees and expenses;
- e) Awarding pre-judgment interest and post-judgment interest; and

f) Awarding Plaintiff and the Class such other and further relief as this Court may deem just and proper.

Dated: May 21, 2021

Respectfully submitted,

Stein Saks PLLC

s/ Eliyahu Babad

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